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ABSTRACT

The process paradigm for teaching writing has been the dominant curricular model for the past 20 years, but by anatomizing various dimensions of this paradigm, it becomes clear why it, like any other paradigmatic model, will not last forever. To be adopted and become normative, any new paradigm has to appeal to salient features of the prevailing intellectual, social, and political climate. The process paradigm has become embedded and promulgated in the theory, research, and textbooks that dominate the field because it satisfies a number of dimensions lacking in the old, current-traditional paradigm. However, every paradigm is heavily value-laden; as values and priorities change, paradigms must change to accommodate them. An examination of these dimensions (intellectual, pedagogical, political, philosophical, social, ethnographic, psychological, gender, professional, and economic) demonstrates how the process paradigm satisfies values and priorities and delineates potentially disruptive influences. An educational model is unstable because the population it represents is not static, and the very dimensions listed above reside in a constant state of flux. When the process paradigm is supplanted, as it inevitably must be, its replacement will embed and accommodate many of the same principles that the process paradigm has accommodated so comfortably. Certainly, whatever new paradigms arise, they will be expected to fulfill enduring, value-laden national goals, existing, necessarily, not only for the individual's, but also for the nation's own good. (Thirty-eight references are appended.) (HB)

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The Composition Curriculum: A Paradigm of Possibilities[1]

"A new scientific truth does not triumph by convincing its opponents and making them see the light, but rather because its opponents eventually die, and a new generation grows up that is familiar with it."
-- Max Planck, Scientific Autobiography

A new paradigm for teaching writing, like a second marriage, represents a triumph of hope over experience.
Bloom's 8th law, with apologies to Samuel Johnson

I. Introduction

A. Fifteen years ago, when I was being interviewed for co-director of the Eastern Virginia Writing Project, the director asked, right off the bat, "What's the magic word?" "Process," I answered, in the same tone of voice that "Plastics" was uttered as the mantra of The Graduate, and of course I was hired, on the strength of my acceptance of what was still, to some, a new and therefore dangerous, paradigm. Today, however, the magic word might be "hypertext" (not computers), or "rhetoric," or "discourse communities," or "dialogic imagination," or "social constructivism," or "literacy" or "multiculturalism," or . . . .

Thesis: By anatomizing various dimensions of the process paradigm for teaching writing, this paper will show how and why it has been the dominant curricular model for the past twenty years, and will offer some reasons for why this, like any other paradigmatic model, will not last forever.

II. On Paradigms: Definitions

A. Kuhn defines a paradigm as "The entire constellation of beliefs, values, techniques, and so on shared by the

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members of a given community" (175)--theory, methods, standards; a map and directions essential for map-making (109), or one element of that constellation (175).

B. [Disciplinary] "revolutions are those non-cumulative developmental episodes in which an older paradigm is replaced in whole or in part by an incompatible new one" (Kuhn 92).

C. The paradigm shift that replaced the current-traditional paradigm with a process model (Connors, 1981, Hairston 1982) is the result, I'd say, not so much from trying to explain phenomena as to solve problems, although explanation and solution are perforce interrelated. However, in order to be adopted and become normative, the new paradigm has to appeal to salient features of the prevailing climate: **intellectual, social and political**

1. In teaching, the statement of the problem, any problem, usually goes like this:
X is wrong/a problem.
If only we **[teachers]**
could get them **[students]**
to do **[Y] (or A,B,C,D)**
this would **correct the difficulty** and **solve the problem.**

2. Translation re composition:
Our students don't write very well, despite repeated grammatical advice, drill, exposure to exemplary models, workbooks, extensive corrections of their papers, objective testing, separation of writing from disciplinary subjects, placement (including "remedial"), punishment.

3. **The solution:** If only we could get students to learn writing as a process, they'd be able to think and write better--with more understanding of and investment in the subject, more commitment to their writing, greater responsiveness to their audience, fuller development, more revisions, better style. They would be better students, better citizens, better human beings; our country will thrive and prosper. If only we--teachers, school systems, society--adopt this paradigm, and its components, we'll revolutionize the teaching of writing and ultimately, the western world as we know it.

III. **The Process Paradigm** has, during the past twenty years, become embedded and promulgated in the theory, research, and textbooks that dominate the field; it is taken for granted now as the "normal" teaching of writing.

A. The process paradigm has been compelling, and consequently acceptable, because it satisfies a number of significant dimensions lacking in the old, current-traditional paradigm, and as a consequence promises to solve the problem of inadequate student writing. Let's look at these dimensions, bearing in mind that they overlap and intertwine.

Intellectual: Contemporary rhetoric has an (1) **epistemic** base, and includes not only persuasion (the focus of classical rhetoric), but "communication, contemplation, inquiry, self-expression," etc. In lowering "the barriers between speaker or writer and audience, it shifts the emphasis toward cooperation, mutuality, social harmony." (2) Rhetoric is "the pursuit--and not simply the transmission--of truth and right," whose pattern emerges in the process of writing and is modified by that process. (3) Thus rhetoric is also self-discovery, and style "an expression of the writer's personality." (4) Writing always takes place within a discourse community, for it works within and reflects a world view. (Ohmann 1964 in Berlin, 1987, 169). Writing is the basis for **The Making of Meaning** (Berthoff, 1981), rather than merely a transparent container for the transmission of ideas.

Pedagogical: Looking at writing as a **process** rather than as a **completed product** is a logical, common-sensible application of the epistemic view of rhetoric, with its embedded philosophical and social concerns. It seems obvious once Murray (1968) and then a host of others pointed it out. **Exposing** the process (Emig 1971) or processes (cf Flower and Hayes, 1981), telling and showing students **how-to-do-it**, should enable them to write better than if the process remains mysterious, is ignored, or is simply taken for granted.

Political: Process writing fits the political climate of its origin and promulgation in the late 60s and 1970s, because of its direct concern for the students themselves, particularly those who are minorities or underprepared. Writing without teachers can be, as Elbow asserts (1973), **writing with power** (1981). Scholes's corollary is **reading with [Textual] power** (1985), intended to shift the locus of authority, and hence power, from teachers as priestly interpreters of literature, to student readers. The positive alternatives to **errors** are, as Shaughnessy discovered,

expectations (1977).

Philosophical: Everyone in a democracy has **The Right to Literacy** (Lunsford et al, 1990; Freire, 1968; Kozol, 1967, 1985, 1991), and consequently a right to read and write with power. This is "an ethical necessity, a professional imperative" (Clifford in Lunsford, 261).

Social: The process paradigm replaces a hierarchical power structure with a horizontal one. Its social dimensions include **collaborative learning** (Bruffee, 1984), an emphasis on **collaborative writing** (Ede and Lunsford, 1983; Lunsford and Ede, 1990), induction into and immersion in **discourse communities** (Bizzell 1982, Bartholomae 1985, Bruffee 1984). In over 400 of 3000 American colleges and universities (McLeod 1988), this horizontal structure encompasses **a writing across the curriculum** program, with its potential for embracing the diverse worldviews and discourses of science and humanities, the liberal arts and the professions (see Maimon, 1981; Young and Fulwiler, 1986). WAC ultimately asks, says Russell (1991), "In what ways will graduates of our institutions use language, and how shall we teach them to use it in those ways? . . . What discourse communities--and ultimately, what social class--will students be equipped to enter" 307)?

Ethnographic, and inseparable from the political and social dimensions, is the concern for **writing in context** (Mishler 1978), of and by people of varied race, class, ethnicity, age, and gender rather than just the academically or economically elite who dominated American higher education before World War II. Writing in context mandates research in context, which in turn leads to sensitive interpretations of lower and lower middle class Ways with Words (Heath 1983) and Lives on the Boundary (1989), Rose's moving study of the intersections of marginality and mainstream.

Psychological, with a particular emphasis on gender: An examination of process leads inevitably--in a socially sensitive era--to a host of related questions, such as do girls and women read (Flynn and Schweickart, 1986), write (Woolf, 1929; Flynn, 1988) think and learn (Gilligan 1982) differently from boys and men? Are they taught differently? Should they be? Research on writer's block and writing anxiety (Rose, 1984; Bloom, 1985) likewise focuses on impediments to an effective writing process.

Professional: The 200+ sites of the National Writing Project, the national professional organizations (notably

NCTE and CCC), most of the major textbooks in the field (except the holdout Warriner's) reify and reinforce all of the above. Come out from behind "the big desk," urges Atwell (1987), and write **in the middle** of your students.

Economic: The process method of teaching writing is inefficient, labor intensive, not quantifiable or easily measurable (for 20s-50s alternatives see Russell, particularly Chapters 6 and 7, "Writing and the Ideal of Utility," "Writing and Social Efficiency"). So its costs have to be justified on social, political or other grounds, and lobbied for in relation to other national, state, and local priorities.

IV. **Why the process paradigm won't last forever.** Every paradigm is heavily value-laden; as values and priorities change, paradigms must change to accommodate them. No transient--and we are all strangers in paradigms--ever resides permanently in Utopia.

A. As Frost said, "Nothing gold can stay"; any educational model is unstable because the population it represents is not static. Although it's hard to see the forest when we're in the middle of it, let's look at some of the potentially disruptive influences on the process paradigm. Whether these meet Kuhn's criteria of sufficient number, magnitude, desperation, and/or competing philosophies (91-93) to constitute an incipient paradigm shift, or just symptoms of the usual academic grumbling, only hindsight will tell.

Again, the categories below intertwine and overlap.

Intellectual: We don't have much hard (or even soft) evidence that process writing and WAC programs really accomplish their intended aims, other than making the dedicated participants feel happy and enthusiastic about writing. Do students really write better than they did when instructed under the current-traditional paradigm? Or with structural linguistics, sentence-combining exercises, or through reading literary masterpieces?

EX: SAT verbal scores have slipped from c. 468 in 1969 to 422 in 1990. White says that half of this decline really reflects the fact that a much wider spectrum of the population is now taking the test, including women, non-native speakers and minorities, but that the other half is a real decline, not an artifact of the testing situation. Critics can and do take this statistic out of context.

Pedagogical: A rigid application of the process paradigm can make it as lockstep and unaccommodating as any other

method of teaching writing, as students march through rigidly demarcated prewriting, writing, and revising "activities," analogous to the old style "drills."

Political: Process writing is always under fire, especially if test scores don't improve. Hard-line proponents of grammatical correctness and rule-bound education oppose freewriting, journal writing, and (often) expressive writing and a student-centered classroom. Typical objection: "Instead of teaching the fundamental basics, schools and teachers are taking the roles of psychologists . . . and using the classroom for exposing family problems of a personal and private nature. . . . Journals are mandated with no motive of having the sentence structure or grammar corrected, but only to invade the sanctuary of the student's mind, heart, or home." (in Schlafly, Child Abuse in the Classroom, 110).

Social: E.D. Hirsch's reform plan for American schooling would make Cultural Literacy (1987) a national priority for all children, not only the elite. His conception of cultural literacy, embedded in a list of some 4400 terms of "core knowledge" that "literate Americans know" (ranging from "1066" to "Zurich") would be the basis for school textbooks and national testing.

Professional: 1) Untrained WAC teachers (yes, even in English departments) are so often embedded in the correctness model and spend so much time "correcting" papers that they (a) Really aren't teaching writing. (b) Resent the time that WAC requires. (c) Become skeptical of the WAC philosophy, especially if they don't see significant results in their students' writing.
2) There is a vast array of textbooks, with diverse emphases on critical thinking, "strong" and resistant reading, writing across the disciplines, expressive writing, multiculturalism, gender-related issues, belles lettres--among others. Do these signal a breakup of the process paradigm?

Economic: By analogy with the US-USSR science race in the 60's, will process writing enable us to become economically competitve with Japan? Will this (or any other set of economic priorities) cause national, state, and local policies, particularly during economic hard times, to provide the resources to support such a labor-intensive activity if its results are not demonstrable and repeatable on a quantifiable scale? Will corporate sponsors continue to fund WAC workshops and related activities?

> If our culture supports what it values, then where are the Little League Writing Teams, the Big Ten Writing Bowl competitions, the daily newspaper pages filled with book reviews and belletristic essays? Where is SuperScribe Sunday, where all other activity ceases so everyone can watch major writers on TV?

I'm going to end with a promise and a question. The promise is that <u>when</u>, not if, the process paradigm is suppplanted, its replacement will embed and accommodate many of the same principles that have dominated 20th century American education that the process paradigm has accommodated so comfortably. The question is: what well-known voice in 20th century education made the following claim, that a particular paradigm of possibility is capable of "breaking the cycle of illiteracy for deprived children; raising the living standard of families who have been illiterate . . . achieving greater social justice; enabling all citizens to participate in the political process . . . in short, achieving the fundamental goals of the Founders at the birth of the republic." Was it John Dewey, Mina Shaughnessy, Richard Ohmann, Richard Young, or Mike Rose? Or somebody else?

Whatever new paradigms arise, and they will because they always do, they will be expected to fulfill these enduring, value-laden national goals. The process paradigm, like other paradigms past, and passing, and to come, exists not only for the individual's--but for the nation's--own good.

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